

A Message from the Director



As an Army Veteran, I am honored to have the opportunity to serve as the Director of the VA Maryland Health Care System in leading the charge to make sure that you are receiving safe, quality and compassionate care, even during a pandemic. Through these challenging times, we have all had to adjust how we work, communicate and relate

to others. On behalf of the employees and volunteers throughout our health care system, I thank you for your patience and support as we made necessary changes to ensure your safety and wellbeing. Now, more than one year after the start of the pandemic, we are beginning to see light at the end the tunnel thanks to the availability of the COVID-19 vaccines.

If you have not been vaccinated, I encourage you to schedule an appointment by calling the Appointment

Center at **410-605-7333** Monday – Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. When your appointment is scheduled, you will be notified of the vaccine we are offering at that time.

We are also offering the COVID-19 vaccine to unenrolled Veterans, Veteran spouses and caregivers, and CHAMPVA recipients under the SAVE LIVES Act. This expanded authority allows the VA to provide added protection to more individuals. It is our hope that the vaccines will help us overcome this pandemic together.

As we move forward, I want you to know we are still here to address your health care needs with virtual and face-to-face options. Each of our eight locations are open and fully operational, so please call today to schedule an appointment.

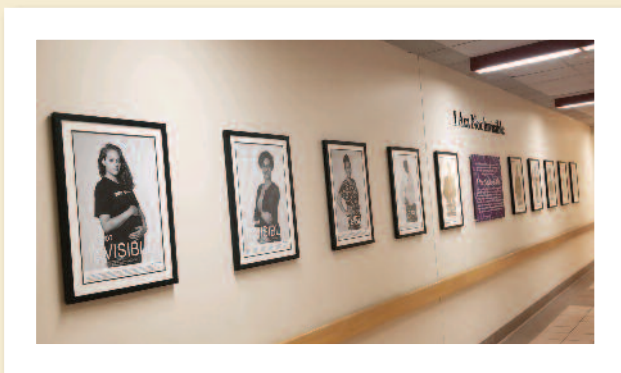
Thank you for your service and for choosing the VA Maryland Health Care System.

Sincerely,

Jonathan R. Eckman, P.E.

Director, VA Maryland Health Care System

I Am Not Invisible Project on Display at the Baltimore VA Medical Center



There are roughly two million women Veterans throughout the United States and the number of women using VA health care has doubled in the past decade. The I Am Not Invisible project aims to increase awareness about women Veterans and open the viewers' eyes to the numerous contributions,

needs and experiences of women who have served in the military. The display spotlights the many faces of this diverse and important segment of the Veteran community. The next time you visit the Baltimore VA Medical Center, stop by the hallway outside the auditorium on the second floor to see the display!

DidYOUknow?

More women are choosing VA for their health care than ever before. Thirty percent of all new VHA users are women. The number of women Veterans using VA health care services has tripled in the past 20 years, growing from 159,810 in 2001 to more than 510,170 today!



STILL ON THE FENCE ABOUT THE VACCINE?

The COVID-19 vaccines save lives and protect you from serious illness from COVID-19. All the COVID-19 vaccines are effective at preventing you from getting very sick, needing to be hospitalized, and they are highly effective at preventing death. They will also prevent you from getting long-term COVID-19 effects, where persistent symptoms often include brain fog, fatigue, headaches, dizziness and shortness of breath.

Getting vaccinated will protect those you love as well. When you are vaccinated, you are much less likely to pass COVID-19 to others you spend time with. Once you are fully vaccinated, you can resume everyday activities that were disrupted by the pandemic.

How safe are the vaccines?

We have reviewed the evidence from clinical trials and safety monitoring of all three vaccines. The COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective, and any serious vaccine-related problems are extremely rare.

Some people who receive the vaccine experience a reaction, including mild symptoms like a fever, headache or chills. These usually go away on their own within a few days. These side effects are a sign your immune system is doing exactly what it is supposed to do – it is working and building protection against the disease.



Here's how to get the vaccine:

- Visit www.maryland.va.gov for a listing of COVID-19 vaccine hours and locations, or
- Call **410-605-7333** Monday-Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. to schedule an appointment.

DID YOU RECEIVE THE SHOT OUTSIDE OF VA? LET US KNOW!

If you received a COVID-19 vaccine outside of the VA Maryland Health Care System and you want to have your vaccination reflected in your VA medical record, simply provide evidence of your vaccination such as a completed CDC vaccination record card. Veterans can provide this information to their primary care team via secure messaging through My HealtheVet, during a virtual visit or in person if they already have a scheduled appointment.

Why is it important to get evidence of COVID-19 vaccination added to your official medical record?

Voluntary reporting of an outside COVID-19 vaccination will help in many ways, including ensuring the safety of our Veterans, their families, visitors and staff. It will also help VA keep complete, up-to-date medical records for our Veterans; give VA a complete picture of who is protected against the virus; and help us determine the most appropriate course of action for expanding in-person care services.

SIGN UP to Receive Real-Time Information and Other Updates:

To receive real-time information about COVID-19, the distribution of the vaccine and other important updates from the VA Maryland Health Care System, we encourage you and a family member to visit www.maryland.va.gov and go to "Connect with VA Maryland Health Care System" on the homepage to sign-up to receive Email Updates, follow us on Twitter and "Like" us on Facebook. This is the fastest and most reliable way to receive the latest information about our program and services directly from us. You can also unsubscribe from any of these options at any time.



Communication is key!

Connect with your health care team at your convenience



My HealtheVet—VA's online patient portal for personal health records—has played an important role in serving Veterans who want to securely communicate online with their health care providers at the VA Maryland Health Care System. Just ask Army Veteran Steve B. (*not shown*) who has been using My HealtheVet for years. Although he experienced a few obstacles navigating the system when he first registered, he quickly got the hang of it and uses it regularly. "I love the fact that I can order and track my medications without having to stand in the pharmacy line or call in," he said.

Due to the pandemic, Steve and fellow Veterans relied on secure messaging, now an accepted and convenient way for Veterans and providers to stay connected between appointments. With secure messaging, Veterans can ask non-urgent health related questions, provide updates on their condition, ask routine administrative questions, and request VA referrals, test results and prescription renewals directly from members of their VA treatment team.

During the pandemic, My HealtheVet became a driving force in how technology kept Veterans connected to their VA providers. Using My HealtheVet, for example, Veterans could access documents from their medical records in one easy location. My HealtheVet also allows Veterans to refill and track prescriptions, get email reminders about upcoming appointments, and build a Personal Health Record by self-entering personal information and data. Additionally, My HealtheVet enables Veterans' caregivers to keep track of their loved ones' health, stay in touch with VA providers and maintain peace of mind knowing they can be part of the health care process.

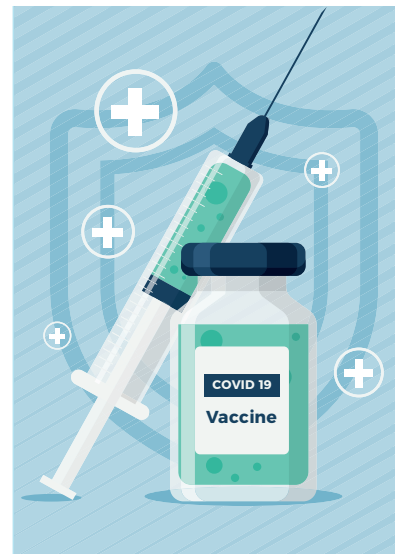
Getting Started:

Veterans wanting to use secure messaging to communicate with their VA providers through My HealtheVet must first register and then request a premium account.

Here is how you can get started:

- Visit www.myhealth.va.gov and click on the green "Register" button at the top of the page.
- Follow the prompts to complete the fields and create a user ID and password.
- Upgrade to a premium account through face-to-face verification (in the Enrollment office at the Baltimore VA Medical Center), by visiting the id.me website, or through a VA Video Connect appointment.

"One of the best features for me is the My HealtheVet Blue Button," Steve said. The Blue Button connects Veterans using My HealtheVet to all their lab results and notes from their providers. "I recommend all Veterans register for My HealtheVet because it has been a huge relief by allowing me to be involved in my care," he added.



Your COVID-19 Vaccine Records Online

Learn how to view or upload vaccination information online

If you choose to get vaccinated, your vaccine information will be available online to review and share with other health care providers through MyHealtheVet. You must have a **Premium account** to access your vaccine information.

To start, sign in to MyHealtheVet and select 'Health Records' on the far right side of the homepage. Once there, select 'VA Blue Button Report' or 'VA Health Summary.' The VA Blue Button report will allow you to choose specific dates and types of information. The VA Health Summary doesn't allow for editing, but is more easily shared electronically. You can choose either or both.

VA Blue Button

Each dose of the COVID-19 vaccine will show up individually in the VA Blue Button Custom Report, both the PDF and plain text versions.

Caring for a Veteran with Service-Connected Disabilities?



HELP IS AVAILABLE!

Caregivers of Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care but don't meet the criteria for the Program for Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers can still receive support from the Caregiver Support Program through the Program of General Caregiver Support Services. Education and training are available in a variety of formats to help caregivers care for themselves and the Veteran. No formal application is required. Simply call **410-605-7000, ext. 54143** or **55248** to begin the enrollment process.

VA has expanded its Program for Comprehensive Assistance to Family Caregivers, available through its Caregiver Support Program. In addition to Veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn, the program is now open to eligible Veterans who served on or before May 7, 1975, including those who served in World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam.

The Program for Comprehensive Assistance to Family Caregivers provides support to family members caring for Veterans at home with service-connected disabilities. Benefits include:

- Education and training
- Access to health care insurance (if caregiver is otherwise uninsured)
- Mental health counseling
- Financial stipend
- Respite care
- Wellness contact
- Travel and per diem compensation (when traveling for a Veteran's VA medical appointment)

To be eligible, the Veteran must be enrolled in VA health care and have:

- Incurred or aggravated a serious injury or illness in the line of duty **on or before May 7, 1975, or on or after September 11, 2001.**

- A single or combined service-connected disability rating of 70% or more.
- A need for personal care services for a minimum of six continuous months based on either:
 - o An inability to perform an activity of daily living (such as dressing, bathing, grooming, toileting or feeding oneself)
 - o A need for supervision, protection or instruction due to a functional impairment that directly impacts the Veteran's ability to maintain his or her personal safety on a daily basis

Veterans and their caregivers may apply for the program online at www.caregiver.va.gov or by downloading VA Form 10-10CG found on the site and returning the completed form in the mail to the address on the form. To speak with a member of the Caregiver Support Program at the VA Maryland Health Care System, please call **410-605-7000, ext. 54143.**

Veterans interested in the Program for Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers who aren't receiving VA health care are encouraged to first apply for VA health care enrollment by calling **1-877-222-8387** or visiting www.va.gov and clicking on "Apply now for VA health care."

TO SCREEN, OR NOT TO SCREEN

If you are due or overdue for a routine screening—there's no time like the present to schedule an appointment. Routine screenings—particularly for cancer—remain important because early detection can make a difference in health outcomes.

"We are continuing to provide all routine age appropriate, gender specific and individualized screening and preventive measures for our patients, and we now have greater access to face to face care than in the earliest days of the COVID 19 pandemic," said Dr. Dhruv Gadhia, Deputy Associate Chief of Staff for Ambulatory & Emergency Care. "Veterans are encouraged to contact their primary care teams via secure messaging on My HealtheVet with any questions about which screening or preventive services they are eligible for, and they can also schedule telephone, video or face to face visits if they have not been seen in more than a year." (See Communication is Key for Secure Messaging on page 3.)



Although various specialty services have adapted to ensure safety during the pandemic, Veterans are encouraged to schedule routine screenings. The Women Veterans Health Program Clinical Director Dr. Catherine Staropoli, for instance, wants Veterans to know "we're open for business." The VA Maryland Health Care System has dedicated spaces for women Veterans to receive mammograms, a pap test and other gender specific screenings.



Pandemic or not, screening for colorectal cancer is a vital task for most adults age 50 to 75 (and some younger adults depending on other factors that increase risk). "We want Veterans to continue

to receive high-quality colorectal cancer screening," said Dr. Erik von Rosenvinge, Chief of Gastroenterology. "However, we do not recommend colonoscopy for screening of average-risk individuals at this time. In light of the pandemic, we recommend fecal immunochemical testing (FIT), which is an excellent alternative and can be performed in the safety of one's home," he said.

Veterans who are at greater than average risk for colorectal cancer (e.g. those with a family history of colorectal cancer in a parent or sibling under the age of 60 years) should typically still be screened with a colonoscopy, and we continue to offer these procedures.



The eyes have it in Optometry Service. "Optometry providers at all VA Maryland Health Care System Eye Clinic locations perform routine, comprehensive eye health and vision examinations, which are an important part of preventative health care," said Dr. Zoe Lazarou, Chief of Optometry Service. A comprehensive eye exam allows the clinician to evaluate and detect any eye disease or vision problem, including cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy. "Many serious eye diseases and vision problems have no symptoms in their early stages, so patients may not know that a problem exists," she said. "Early diagnosis and treatment of these conditions can help prevent permanent vision loss."

The Eye Clinics continue to offer face-to-face eye examinations, but at a reduced capacity to comply with all COVID-19 social distancing and safety protocols. Optometry appointments are direct schedule, so no consult is needed. Simply call the Appointment Center at 410-605-7333 or request an appointment online via the VA online scheduling option on the VA mobile app at mobile.va.gov.

Taking House Calls to the Next Level



Technology Brings the Doctor to the Patient's Home

While telehealth services have been used in VA health care long before the COVID-19 pandemic, the technology has become vital over the past year, enabling Veterans to continue to receive quality health care from the safety and convenience of their homes. Now that VA Maryland Health Care System facilities are open for face-to-face appointments, telehealth services are still a critical option for accessing care. Luis Kranwinkel, the Facility Telehealth Coordinator for the VA Maryland Health Care System, explains:

Telehealth uses digital technology to virtually connect a patient to a health care provider, in real-time, anywhere and at any time. It can break down many of the barriers our Veterans face with an in-person visit for medical care, like distance, lack of transportation, mobility limitations, and in the case of COVID-19, social distancing.

Last Spring, the coronavirus forced the VA Maryland Health Care System to take extensive measures to help prevent the spread of the disease, including temporarily closing our outpatient clinics, limiting face-to-face services at our medical centers, and restricting visitors to inpatient units.

We didn't know how long the pandemic would last, but we knew we had to find a way to keep Veterans connected with their VA health care providers, without putting anyone at unnecessary risk. And we knew telehealth could provide the solution.

The Telehealth Team sprang into action. We tied our 'boots' and started to work on bridging the connection for the safety of our patients and staff. This included increasing the use of My HealtheVet, the online patient portal that allows patients to access their medical records and send secure messages to their providers. Telehealth staff also loaned tablets to hospitalized patients through the "Digital Divide" program so they could

communicate with providers and family members.

Perhaps the biggest impact on patient care was to get all primary care and mental health providers and most specialists trained to use VA Video Connect, an application that allows patient-to-physician interaction through video appointments. To assist Veterans not familiar with technology, Telehealth set up a Call Tree program to help bridge the connection with their provider.

So what do you need to use VA Video Connect?

For starters, a device with connection to the internet. This could be a smart phone, a tablet, a laptop or a desktop computer. You will also need an email address so that your provider can send you an email. Then, all you have to do is open the email or text message and click on the line that says, "Click Here to Join the VA Video Connect appointment" to open VA Video Connect and virtually join your provider in the "room."

No device? No problem. We can help. Just like providers can get a consultation from a medical specialist, they can request a consult with the Telehealth team to help connect a Veteran with a device. The Telehealth team will reach out to the patient to assess their needs, order the equipment as required, and show the patient how to use it.

Veterans and providers are embracing the technology. We've seen a 1,000 percent increase in the use of VA Video Connect in the past year. That's ten times more compared to pre-pandemic levels.

The bottom line: Telehealth works. It can't completely replace a physical examination and face to face interactions with a health care provider, but it can greatly augment the care already received. I encourage any Veteran interested in receiving care through VA Video Connect to speak with their VA health care provider.



is the new 70

Cen-te-nar-i-an (noun): a person who is 100 years old or older

Veterans at the VA Maryland Health Care System are achieving milestone triple-digit birthdays, thanks to healthy lifestyle choices and positive attitudes.

Col. Orville Hughes (retired) is one of our youngest centenarians, having just turned 100. A World War II, Korean War Veteran and Purple Heart recipient, Hughes served the nation in the Army on active duty for 27 years and credits his longevity to staying active and having a go-with-the-flow attitude. Until the pandemic hit, he was still driving short distances and staying connected to friends and family. Thanks to the COVID-19 vaccine, Hughes was able to reunite with many of his family and friends as they celebrated his 100th birthday together in June.

Rhode Island native and Army Veteran **Steven Melnikoff**, 101, moved to Maryland to work as an engineer at Bethlehem Steel. He looks forward to turning 102 in November. A World War II Veteran who served in the 29th Division, he participated in the Omaha Beach invasion and served until the end of the war. Melnikoff, who used the GI bill to go to college, credits his longevity to staying active and positive. “When we were kids, we walked everywhere. Back then, meat was expensive, so we ate more vegetables and had meat only when we could afford it,” he said. Still active, Melnikoff gardens and takes care of his property.

Theodore Focht, also 101, enlisted in the Army at 24 and served as a machine gunner during World War II. He also spent time as a Prisoner of War. He credits his longevity to good habits—such as walking every day—even at his advanced age. Other good habits that may have contributed to his long life is never smoking and “drinking an occasional beer with steamed crabs and mostly, loving your significant other with passion.”

Ezra Hill, a Baltimore native who turned 110 years old last December, is counted as Maryland’s oldest living Veteran and the

second oldest in the nation. A World War II Army Veteran, he landed at Normandy shortly after D-Day and credits his longevity to not hating anyone or staying angry and to keeping cool-headed and calm.

These Veterans are not outliers at the VA Maryland Health Care System, where a special GeriPACT clinic focuses on optimizing the oldest Veterans’ ability at maintaining good health and improving quality of life. More than 50 Veterans ranging in age from 99 to 110 receive care at this specialty clinic, located at the Loch Raven VA Medical Center. As life expectancy rises in developed and developing countries, the number of people living to age 100 and older is also on the rise with the highest number of centenarians living in the U.S.

“These oldest patients can have medically complex issues,” said Dr. Saeeduddin Khan, one of the lead providers of the GeriPACT team who serves the older senior citizens. “Our goal is to do what is best for the Veterans’ wellbeing.” For Khan, this means reducing the need for hospital and long-term care services by maintaining good health and promoting preventive care.

The GeriPACT team also works with caregivers, family members and others, teaching them to manage and cope with age-related changes in health that include hearing and vision problems, changes in bowel or bladder function, diminished strength and endurance, and other issues.

“Like the Hippocratic Oath, our goal is to do no harm and to do more with less medicines, if possible, and to maintain quality of life as long as possible” Khan said.



Col. Orville Hughes



Theodore Focht

Veterans Community Care Program Helps You Get the Care You Need, When You Need It

Veterans may be eligible to receive primary and specialty care by a community provider at VA expense when the care is not available from VA, the Veteran meets certain standards for drive times and how long the wait is to receive care, or it is in the best medical interest of the Veteran.

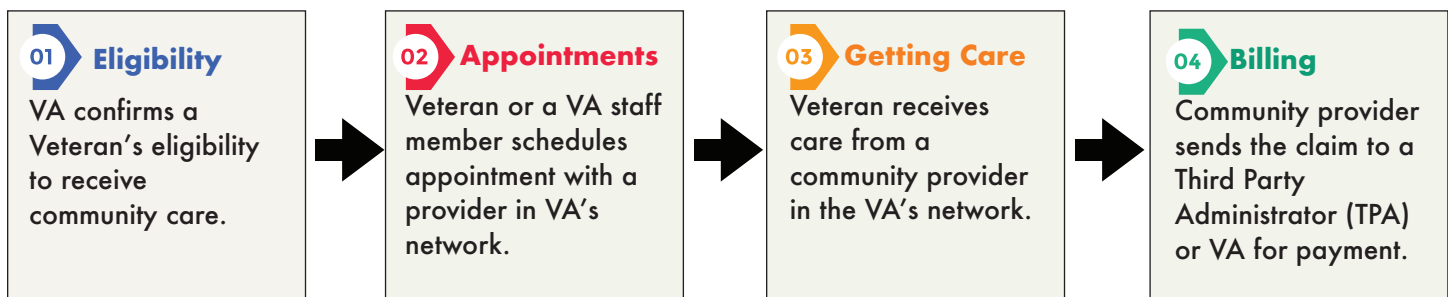
Previously, this type of non-VA care was provided through the Veterans Choice Program, a temporary solution created in 2014 to address wait times and provide Veterans greater access to care. The Choice Program ended in 2019 when the VA MISSION Act was implemented and along with it, an expanded and more comprehensive Veterans Community Care Program.

In most cases, Veterans must still receive approval from VA before receiving care from a community provider to avoid being billed for the care. An exception to this is the new Urgent Care benefit (see page 10).

The new, simplified process for a Veteran to receive care from a provider in the community can be outlined in four key steps.



Process Overview



1. Eligibility: VA confirms a Veteran's eligibility to receive community care.

Once confirmed, VA sends the Veteran and the selected community provider a referral. VA also sends the Veteran's medical documentation to the community provider to ensure proper care coordination between their VA care team and the community provider.

2. Appointments: Veterans or a VA staff member schedules appointment with a provider in VA's network.

Veterans now have the option to directly schedule appointments themselves if they prefer, once VA confirms eligibility and identifies a provider.

3. Getting Care: Veteran receives care from a community provider in the VA's network.

When a Veteran arrives for the appointment, the

community provider should have the VA referral and medical documentation on file.

4. Billing: Community provider sends the claim to a Third Party Administrator (TPA) or VA for payment.

Veterans may have to pay a copayment for non-service-connected care, just as they do at VA medical facilities. Bills for copayments will come from VA, not the community provider. For help with any billing issues, Veterans can call the VA Community Care Contact Center at **877-881-7618**.

Interested in receiving care in the community? Get started by speaking with your VA provider to first determine your eligibility.

Learn more at www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE.

Community Care Network Prescriptions

The VA Community Care Network (CCN) is VA's direct link with community providers to ensure Veterans receive timely, high-quality care. CCN is comprised of six regional networks covering all U.S. states and territories. CCN uses industry-standard approaches and guidelines to administer services, promptly pay for services and manage the network to its full potential.

What prescriptions are covered under my Community Care Network (CCN) prescription benefit?

Up to a 14-day supply of medication prescribed by an in-network community provider can be filled at an in-network pharmacy. The medication must be on VA's Urgent/Emergent Formulary list located at www.pbm.va.gov/PBM/NationalFormulary.asp.

Can I get my flu shot at a community pharmacy?

Yes, flu shots are covered when administered at an in-network community pharmacy.

How do I locate an in-network community pharmacy?

You can locate an in-network pharmacy at www.va.gov/find-locations/.

What information will I need to provide the community pharmacy?

The community pharmacy may require you to show your Veterans Member ID card and provide them with the BIN, PCN and Group numbers located to your left on this information sheet.

How do I get routine medications that are not urgent or emergent?

Routine medications are required to be filled at VA pharmacies. These prescriptions can be sent by your community provider to the VA pharmacy electronically or by fax. Opioid prescriptions cannot be faxed by your community provider. These prescriptions will need to be hand delivered or mailed to the VA pharmacy to be filled.

Who can I call if I have difficulty filing a prescription at a community pharmacy? You can call the Optum help desk number at 888-901-6609, between 7 a.m. and 12 a.m., 7 days a week.

My community care referral has expired, how can I get my community prescription filled?

Once your community referral expires, prescriptions related to that referral can no longer be filled in the community or at VA. You will need to work with your VA provider to have a new referral placed to continue to get your prescriptions filled.

How do I report a visit to a community emergency room? Will my related prescriptions be covered?

VA should be notified of any emergency care at a community emergency department within 72 hours by calling 1-844-724-7842. Prescriptions related to authorized in-network community emergency room visits and/or hospitalizations will be filled following the processes outlined above. VA formulary Urgent/Emergent prescriptions can be filled at an in-network community pharmacy and routine prescriptions should be filled at the VA.



Present the following BIN, PCN, and Group Numbers to the Community Pharmacy:

Urgent Care

BIN: 004336
PCN: ADV
Group: RX4136

Routine Care

BIN: 004336
PCN: ADV
Group: RX3839

Optum Help Desk Veteran Eligibility

888-901-6609
7 a.m. – 12 a.m. ET
7 days a week

Emergency Care

Notify VA:
1-844-724-7842

CVS Caremark Pharmacy Help Desk

1-800-364-6331

Office of Community Care Maryland

1-800-949-1003, ext. 26924

What's the Difference Between Urgent Care and Emergency Care?

The VA Mission Act, established to increase access to timely, high-quality care for Veterans, includes a benefit that allows eligible Veterans to receive urgent care services in the community within VA's network. Before you're faced with an illness or injury that requires urgent attention, be prepared.

Know the difference between urgent care and emergency care.

Urgent Care: Illnesses and injuries that require immediate attention but are not life-threatening, such as colds and flu, sprained muscles, minor burns and skin or ear infections.

Urgent Care Services in the Community at VA Expense:

VA offers urgent care services to eligible Veterans at VA or at in-network urgent care clinics closer to your home. Use VA's urgent care benefit to treat minor injuries and illnesses that are not life-threatening, like those listed above. **Follow these steps to receive urgent care services at an in-network urgent care clinic in your community.**

1. Check Your Eligibility

- You are eligible if you are enrolled in the VA health care system and received care through VA from either a VA or community provider within the past 24 months.
- Contact your local VA medical facility to confirm eligibility or call **1-833-483-8669**.

2. Find a Provider

- Find an in-network urgent care provider by going to www.va.gov/find-locations and clicking the link for VA-approved urgent care locations and pharmacies.
- You can search for the nearest urgent care provider by ZIP code, address or VA facility.
- You can also contact the VA's Office of Community Care at **877-881-7618** to find the nearest urgent care provider.
- Once selected, go to the urgent care provider.

3. Confirm the Provider

- When you arrive, confirm that the provider is an in-network VA urgent care provider (a sign may be posted).
- Fill out the intake form and indicate you would like to use your VA urgent care benefit.
- The provider will call **1-833-483-8669** to confirm you are eligible for the urgent care benefit and prescription medication, if needed.
- If you need help, call **866-620-2071**.

4. Copayments

- You may be charged a \$30 copayment for using the urgent care benefit.
- Copayments are billed separately by VA. Do not pay a copayment during the visit.**
- Copayments depend on your assigned priority group and how many times you use urgent care in a calendar year.

5. More Information:

 Visit www.va.gov/communitycare.

Emergency Care: An injury, illness or symptom so severe that without immediate treatment, you believe your life or health is in danger. **If you believe your life or health is in danger, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

Emergency Care:

During a medical emergency, Veterans should immediately seek care at the nearest medical facility. Veterans **do not** need to check with VA before calling for an ambulance or going to an emergency department. During a medical emergency, VA encourages all Veterans to seek immediate medical attention without delay.

It is, however, important to promptly notify VA after receiving emergency care at a community emergency department. **Notification should be made within 72 hours of admission to a community medical facility.** This allows VA to assist the Veteran in coordinating necessary care or transfer to a VA facility, and helps to ensure that the administrative and clinical requirements are met for VA to pay for the care. The Veteran or the community provider can contact the National Emergency Notification Call Center at **844-724-7842** to notify VA of a visit to an emergency department.

After Receiving Care

1. Notify VA

- Once a Veteran's immediate emergency medical care needs have been addressed, the Veteran, a family member, friend or hospital staff member should contact the nearest VA medical facility or call the National Emergency Notification Call Center at **844-724-7842** within 72 hours.

2. Filing a Claim

- Claims for emergency medical care should be submitted to VA as soon as possible after care has been provided.
- The deadline for filing a claim depends on whether the care was provided for a service-connected condition or a nonservice-connected condition.

In most instances, community providers submit medical claims directly to VA for payment consideration. If you incur out-of-pocket, non-copayment-related expenses for unauthorized emergency treatment and VA is unable to work directly with the community provider to resolve the account, you may submit a request for reimbursement of those unauthorized emergency medical expenses to VA. Approval of the request for reimbursement will be subject to administrative and clinical review, and all criteria required in accordance with 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) §1728 or 38 U.S.C. §1725 must be met for reimbursement to be issued. Copayments are not assessed for emergency treatment reimbursed by VA under 38 U.S.C. §1725 or §1728.

A written request for reimbursement, including a receipt of payment, must be submitted to your local VA medical facility Community Care office in a timely manner.

For additional information, please visit the VHA's Office of Community Care website at www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/Emergency_Care.asp.



Go with what works - you have options

For Veteran Margaret Hill-Grigson, virtual appointments offered at the VA Maryland Health Care System during the pandemic proved to be a lifesaver. “I can show my therapist my home and my cats, which are what keep me sane,” she said. “I get to share with her what is important to me, and she gets to see how I am really doing.”

Similarly, Veteran George Carter’s medical challenges kept him housebound since last March, and he found help through virtual appointments. “Virtual therapy helped me open up more since I’m sitting in my own home and not in an office,” he said. “I feel like I can really open up more and the bond is stronger with my psychologist because he gives me an opportunity to talk with him about stuff I wouldn’t talk with my family about.”

Virtual appointments helped Hill-Grigson and Carter stay connected to VA care, despite the pandemic, and they are not alone. The VA Maryland Health Care System provided more than 50,000 virtual mental health care appointments to Veterans during the pandemic, and their success is prompting VA to continue offering virtual appointments even as some COVID-19 safety protocols are being lifted.

As the VA Maryland Health Care System begins to move to more face to face visits, virtual visits will remain part of the services and tools available to those seeking mental health care.

“We understand that stress can cause an increase in depression and anxiety,” said Suzanne Greer, Deputy Director of the Baltimore VA Medical Center’s Mental Health Clinical Center. “Even in a time of social distancing, it is important to seek support and connect with others.”

Pandemic fatigue has made everyone’s lives more challenging, but help from the Mental Health Clinical Center is a click away. Virtual care can provide coping skills and tools to address stress management, but it can also serve as an outlet to discuss difficulties and challenges. “Our online appointments are an easy way to connect and can be done in the comfort of your own home,” Greer said. “Our staff can assist Veterans who are not familiar with how to set up virtual visits until we can come together again for in-person visits.”

Hill-Grigson said that the initial process of getting onto the virtual calls was not easy, but with some training and practice, she has found virtual appointments “something she looks forward to,” especially during the pandemic lockdown when underlying health issues made face-to-face appointments challenging. The virtual appointments enabled her to be consistent with her care while remaining safe. For Carter, the privacy of the virtual appointments made the experience seem stronger.

The Mental Health team is using a hybrid of face-to-face and virtual care to offer Veterans the care they need when they need it and how they need it. Please contact your mental health provider to learn more about virtual visits! If you or someone you know is having a mental health crisis or is struggling with thoughts of self-harm, please call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and press 1 to connect with qualified and caring VA responders 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

VA**HealthWatch****U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**Veterans Health Administration
VA Maryland Health Care SystemPublic & Community Relations (135)
10 N. Greene Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Published for the Veteran patients of the VA Maryland Health Care System. This newsletter is offered to provide reliable health information. It is not intended to take the place of medical advice, which should be obtained directly from your health care provider. If you have questions or comments about *HealthWatch*, please call 410-605-7098.

A Member of the VA Capitol Health Care Network

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Important Phone Numbers

Please report a change of address to the Veterans Health Administration Call Center
Monday – Friday between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. at 877-222-8387 and press option 1.

Appointment Center

410-605-7333

Automated Appointment Line

410-605-7395 (Press Option 1)

Beneficiary TravelBaltimore VA Medical Center:
410-605-7318Perry Point VA Medical Center:
410-642-2411, ext. 26895**Billing Information**

866-393-0006

Burial Information & BenefitsBaltimore National Cemetery
410-644-9696State Veterans Cemeteries
410-923-6981**Care in the Community**

410-642-2411, ext. 26924

Caregiver Support Program

410-605-7000, ext. 54143

Eligibility & Enrollment

410-605-7324

In-Network Urgent Care Providers

877-881-7618

Long-Term Care Information Line

410-642-1121

Medical Records/Release of InformationBaltimore VA Medical Center
410-605-7348Perry Point VA Medical Center
410-642-2411, ext. 26028**My HealtheVet Coordinator**

410-605-7045

Patient Concerns & ComplimentsBaltimore VA Medical Center,
Baltimore VA Annex and
Glen Burnie VA Outpatient Clinic
410-605-7099Perry Point VA Medical Center
and Cambridge & Pocomoke City
VA Outpatient Clinics
410-642-2411, ext. 25097Loch Raven VA Medical Center
and Fort Meade VA Outpatient Clinic
410-605-7542**Prescription Refill Line**

410-605-7395 (Press Option 2)

Returning Veterans(Transition and Care Management)
410-605-7259**Telephone Care Line** 800-865-2441**VA Benefits**Veterans Benefits Information Line
800-827-1000Maryland VA Service & Benefits
Program 800-446-4926, ext. 6450**VA Maryland Health Care System Facilities**Baltimore VA Medical Center
410-605-7000Loch Raven VA Medical Center
410-605-7000Perry Point VA Medical Center
410-642-2411Cambridge VA Outpatient Clinic
410-228-6243Eastern Baltimore County
VA Outpatient Clinic 443-730-2020Fort Meade VA Outpatient Clinic
410-305-5300Glen Burnie VA Outpatient Clinic
410-590-4140Loch Raven VA Outpatient Clinic
410-605-7650Pocomoke City VA Outpatient Clinic
410-957-6718**Vet Centers**Annapolis Vet Center 410-605-7826
Baltimore Vet Center 410-764-9400
Dundalk Vet Center 410-282-6144
Elkton Vet Center 410-392-4485**Veterans Crisis Line**

800-273-8255, Press 1

Women Veterans Services

410-605-7275

CLIP AND SAVE